

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
PORTER SQUARE DESIGN PROJECT
MEETING NOTES**

Subject: **Porter Square Citizen Advisory Committee (Committee) – Meeting #1**

Date, Time & Place October 24, 2002, 6:30-8:30 PM
80 Orchard St (relocated from North Cambridge Senior Center)

Present:

Committee Members:	Corinne Mundari
Carole Montgomery	Glenn Heinmiller
Dave Reed	Alan Albert
John Howard	Doug Berman
George McCray	Simon Shapiro

Public:

Susan Hunziker
Al Gowan
Tom Lenthall

City of Cambridge:

Susanne Rasmussen	Hafthor Yngvason
Owen O’Riordan	Bill Deignan

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (Earthtech)

1. **Welcome and Introductions** (Susanne Rasmussen)

Susanne welcomed committee members back to this second set of meetings to complete construction plans for the renovation of the Porter Square area. The Committee will be working from the design alternative selected by the committee in 1998, which included a left turn out of the Porter Square Shopping Center to Mass. Ave. southbound (SB). Everyone introduced themselves and described their relationship to the Porter Square area and project. Susanne explained that this meeting was both an opportunity to review where this project stands and to discuss issues to be resolved while design work proceeds. Susanne reviewed the agenda and asked for other agenda items.

2. **Update** (Susanne Rasmussen)

The funding to complete the design according to the plan endorsed by the CAC in 1998 was included in the City’s current year budget. The schedule for the design process is to have approximately four meetings of the CAC (with an optional fifth meeting), a public meeting, meetings of the City’s bicycle and pedestrian committees and any other meetings as necessary in order to complete the construction plans by the spring of 2003. Construction of the project, along with sewer separation work completed by the City’s Department of Public works, is expected to begin summer 2003.

Sewer Separation Owen O’Riordan

Owen mentioned that planning for sewer separation in the general area is ongoing. The Porter Square work grew out of a plan to separate sewers along North Mass Avenue. The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), which funds much of this work, decided to reconsider the plan to separate sewers on North Mass Ave. as the best way to improve the water quality in the Alewife Brook. MWRA is still reviewing the plan and there is no imminent answer expected from them. Therefore, plans to separate sewers on North Mass. Ave. are on indefinite hold. Sewer work is being done in the Porter Square area since significant work is being done in the road anyway as part of the surface enhancement project. Field investigations of utilities will begin soon. The construction work in Porter Sq. will be coordinated with work Cambridge and Somerville doing jointly on Beacon St which will begin next year as well.

Questions/Answers

Q. What is the time frame for knowing whether sewer separation will happen on N. Mass. Ave.?

A. The City is in the middle of a state MEPA process to determine how stormwater to Alewife Brook will be handled and the work on N. Mass Ave will be affected by the outcome of this process. It could take 2-4 years before it is know how the water quality issues will be handled.

3. Work Plan - (Bill Deignan)

Susanne explained that Bill will be managing the surface portion of the project and would review the work plan. Bill reviewed the work plan (see below). Over the next six months the meetings listed below of the Committee have been scheduled including a public meeting, to complete the final design for improvements in Porter Square. Meetings with the City's bicycle and pedestrian committees and neighborhood groups will be scheduled prior to the public meeting.

December 18, 2002 – Committee Meeting

January 30, 2003 - Committee Meeting

February 19, 2003 – Public Meeting

March 6, 2003 – Optional Committee Meeting (without consultants)

April 2003 – Committee Meeting

October 24, 2002 – Committee Meeting

- Re-introduce project, committee and staff.
- Discuss schedule/work plan.
- Review design of intersection, plaza and discuss outstanding issues so options can be developed for the 25% plans.

Work plan in between meeting 1 and 2

- Complete updated counts and survey
- Develop options for treatment of left turn from shopping center for vehicles and pedestrians
- Develop concept for signing and pavement markings for left turn for cyclists to Somerville Ave.
- Develop plaza concepts – landscaping, street furniture, lighting
- Review options for other outstanding issues identified by committee
- Begin artist selection

December 18, 2002 – Committee Meeting

- Review updated traffic data and confirm signal operation
- Discuss solutions to outstanding design issues and identify preferred solutions
- Review concepts for plaza landscaping and street furniture - decide on concept

Work plan between meeting 2 and 3

- Develop draft 25% plans
- Review by City Departments
- Identify any outstanding design details for discussion by committee
- Develop draft graphics for use at public meeting
- Meet with MBTA on sidewalk issues and MHD on bridge changes
- Meet with bicycle and pedestrian committees

January 30, 2003 Committee Meeting

- Review 25% design in preparation for public meeting
- Discuss format of meeting and graphics
- Discuss material for paving, street furniture, etc.

Work plan between meeting 3 and public meeting

- Refine 25% design as discussed by Committee
- Develop graphics for public meeting

February 19, 2003 – Public Meeting

- Review 25% plans with community

March 6, 2003 – Optional Committee Meeting (without consultants)

- Follow up on issues discussed at 25% hearing
- Identify issues of importance where refinement can be made
- Discuss preparation of 75% design/final design

April 2003 – Committee Meeting

- Review of the final 75%/ final design
- Discuss revisions of design details

Questions/Answers

Q. Will the scope include looking at the synchronization of the signal at Roseland?

A. Yes. Although construction work will end at Upland Road, the signal at Roseland will be reviewed for coordination with the main intersection at the square.

Q. Will the new traffic data confirm existing traffic patterns at the shopping center since those may have changed since 1998?

A. Yes. Traffic counts will be taken to measure the traffic in and out of the shopping center.

4. Process background

Bill reviewed the original process and where the Committee left off in the spring of 1998. The original process started in 1997 with the goal of improving the conditions for users of Porter Square, particularly pedestrians and cyclists. The Committee agreed on project goals (see handout) by which alternatives were judged. Many alternatives were analyzed (some including a left hand turn and some not) and

many were not advanced either because they did not adequately meet the goals, presented operational problems for pedestrians or vehicles or were not suitable for a variety of other reasons. In the spring of 1998 the final mid-plaza design was conceived and reviewed. This design was agreed upon because it seemed to best meet the goals of the project. The plan did not solve every issue but was the best compromise.

5. Final design review

Bill reviewed the intersection design as it was left in 1998. The design solves some of the most critical problems which were initially identified as follows:

- Better balance of where vehicles exit the shopping center – by having a left hand turn out of the shopping center some of the vehicles going to Mass Ave. SB will have direct access and will not have to exit into Somerville and circulate through the neighborhood.
- Reduce conflict of northbound Mass Ave traffic turning right on Somerville Ave. with one of the heaviest pedestrian movements. This is done by creating a dedicated right turn lane on Mass Ave. to Somerville Ave and separating the vehicle and pedestrian movements into different phases of the signal.
- Eliminate the two phase crossing at Dunkin Donuts. The plan includes a pedestrian phase that is long enough for pedestrians to cross all at one time.
- Create a safe way for cyclists to make a left on Somerville Ave. from SB Mass Ave. During one of the phases of the signal, cyclists will have the opportunity to make an unconflicted left turn from Mass Ave. to Somerville Ave from the bike lane.

Plan Elements for Intersection

Bill reviewed the plan and identified outstanding issues to be discussed and resolved prior to the plan being finalized. The main improvements are:

- **Four new crossings** are created with longer walk times including ones at:
 - Upland on Mass Ave. The angle of this crosswalk will be reviewed.
 - Mass Ave from the tip of the T plaza to the west head house area.
 - Somerville Ave. from the tip of the T plaza to the new plaza in front of CVS. Space will need to be created and a tree most likely removed at the tip of the plaza to make room for handicap ramps and an accessible sidewalk.
 - Somerville Ave. at White St.
- **A fifth crossing** was also proposed in the 1998 plan on Mass. Ave. at Davenport St. Questions have come up about whether cars will see or stop for pedestrians in this four lane crossing given the proximity to the signal. This crossing will be reviewed and discussed and if necessary, other options proposed.
- **Bicycle facilities**
 - Marked bicycle lanes are provided through the intersection
 - A separate signal phase is included for cyclists to take a left on Somerville Ave. A space needs to be identified where cyclists can wait without blocking through cyclists on Mass/ Ave.
- **Plaza**
 - An enlarged plaza area is created by re-aligning Somerville Ave. How this space will be treated in terms of landscaping, street furniture and lighting were discussed under the following agenda item.
- **Traffic Movements**
 - A left turn out of the shopping center parking lot to southbound Mass Ave. has been created. The Committee will need discuss ideas for controlling vehicles and pedestrians so that the space works for both. This was discussed further during a discussion about the plaza.

- An exclusive right turn lane to Somerville Ave from northbound Mass Ave is included so these vehicles do not block through traffic and right turners will no longer conflict with pedestrians crossing from the T plaza to the CVS since pedestrians and vehicles will also have separate phases in the signal.

Questions/Answers

- Q. Can a left turn out of White St. be reviewed again as a way of supplementing the new left from the shopping center and relieving congestion on Mossland and other streets?*
- A. This left was proposed by Sue Clippinger of the City's Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) as a short-term measure. Providing this left was opposed by residents on White St. and City of Somerville representatives but can be reviewed again and its impact assessed. Also, unless space can be created for a new turn left lane, then the rights and lefts out of White St. will need to share a lane which would not be as efficient.
- Q. What can be done about potential illegal left turns from Somerville Avenue to Mass Ave. SB – can this move be included and if not, prevented?*
- A. The move will be reviewed.
- Q. If creating a left from White to Somerville Ave makes it attractive to trucks, can we lift the daytime restriction to trucks on Beech St?*
- A. We can look at this and discuss it with Sue Clippinger of TP&T.
- Q. Who creates bus stops and can the bus stop near Brueggers be shifted closer to the square and a bus pull off created.*
- A. The location and type of bus stop will be reviewed.

Committee Member Comments

- Although neighbors on White St. have been opposed to a left turn to Somerville Ave. in the past, creating this move would benefit several streets throughout the neighborhood.
- Neighbors on Beech St. have opposed lifting the daytime truck ban in the past and cited a daycare center as the reason but that center is no longer there.
- Meacham St. is also used heavily by trucks since it is one of the only legal routes from Davis Square to Mass Ave.
- Look at some of the crosswalks in Arlington for methods to encourage vehicles to stop.
- Trucks make deliveries to Brueggers on Mass. Ave. between 5-6 AM and also at 8 PM preventing the bus from stopping the bus stop.
- The crosswalk at Davenport should be retained or relocated to provide a safe way to cross.
- It is questionable whether bikes will use a bike box to make the left turn to Somerville Ave but they can always ride with the traffic if they prefer.
- Bike bells should be mandatory.
- Although it is now outside of the project area, there is a defined flow of pedestrians at Mt. Vernon and this should be examined.
- The signal timing at Mossland should be reviewed since traffic backs up to Elm St. at the peak hours. This would require coordination with Somerville.

6. Plaza issues (Bill)

The reconfiguring of the intersection creates the opportunity to enlarge the plaza and create a greater sense of place through design elements which could include landscaping, public art and other amenities. There are also issues to consider regarding the interaction of pedestrians and cars in the left turn driveway and about how the plaza design will work vis a vis concerns in the neighborhood about the

homeless and others hanging around. The plaza is also a likely place to use the project funds allocated to public art. Hafthor Yngavson of the Arts Council explained the process.

Public Art (Hafthor Yngvason)

Hafthor briefly explained the City's one percent for art program and the process for selecting an artist who will work with the Arts Council and a sub-group of the CAC to develop ideas for the project. CAC member volunteers will attend a meeting with other jurors to select three possible artists from the Arts Council registry. Since the amount of money for this project is relatively small, the opportunities are somewhat limited but the artwork could help create a sense of place. Ideas include incorporating the art into a bus shelter, a clock or seating. Three people volunteered: John Burkhart, Si Shapiro, Al Gowan.

Plaza Elements

Bill went through the possible elements of the plaza design for the committee to discuss:

- **Bus stop and shelter** The City is committed to maintaining this type of amenity for transit users but the design of the shelter, type of seating and placement will be considered so that the current social problems are not exacerbated.

Comments

- Seating should be divided.

- **Landscaping** The type and amount will depend on how the space will be used and constraints of the T tunnel. Landscaped areas will be irrigated since lack of water is one of the primary problems with maintaining this type of space.

Comments -

- Sightlines should be considered when looking at landscaping material and placement.
- There is a conflict that should be looked at between the desire to shield the street edge from the parking lot with landscaping and ensuring good security/visibility.
- Plant materials should be evergreen and durable, requiring little maintenance.

- **Street Furniture** Design options could be looked at to create a nice space while minimizing the existing social problems. In addition to seating, pedestrian lighting, trash barrels also fall into this category.

Comments -

- The plaza should be a place to walk though, not linger in
- It should not be too dark (needs pedestrian lighting?)
- There should be little seating, perhaps on planters

- **Left turn from shopping center** – This needs to be analyzed carefully to find the best way to treat this vehicle access so it works for both pedestrian and drivers. It will be important to clearly signal to pedestrians when cars will be taking the left (one possibility is pedestrian signal) and to clearly signal cars when and where to stop. Using raised planting areas to create a defined crossing area are also a possibility.

Comments -

- There should be a change in grade where pedestrians cross
- One pathway should be created for pedestrians across the driveway to make it easier to control
- Should determine soon whether truck access needs to be accommodated

- A police officer should be posted at the intersection once the changes start to take place while everyone gets used to the new travel patterns
- It would be good to accommodate pushcarts so long as they didn't compete with shopping plaza retailers
- A plan for news boxes should be considered

7. Project Scope - Bill explained that in addition to the intersection work, the following improvements between Davenport and Beech could also be part of the project scope:

- Replace sidewalks wherever possible as curbs allow. The condition of sidewalks and existing curbs will be reviewed to see where replacement can and needs to be done while avoiding resetting all curbs which involves greater construction in the roadway
- Lighting – limited lighting work can be done with a focus on plaza but also might include repainting existing poles
- Plant new trees, replace existing ones where needed and clean up tree wells
- In terms of bicycle lanes, the plan the Committee endorsed in 1998 shows that bike lanes will continue through the entire project length from Upland to Beech. In order to have bike lanes from Davenport to Beech the median would need to be removed through most of the section but could be left in strategic places to prevent turns and help with pedestrian crossings. Bill initially mentioned that the project would not look at the removal of the median but it was decided that since this was part of the 1998 plan that the issue should be reviewed and discussed by the committee.

General comments -

- Eliminating the median for bike lanes is good as long as effective crosswalks are included in the plan
- Let's go forward with the plan as it stands (without the median) and bring it to a public meeting
- A reduced version (11x17) of the plan should be mailed out to the Committee for everyone to have and reference it
- What is the status of removing parking and placing pavement markings on Mass. Ave at Walden to create a left turn lane to Walden and two northbound travel lanes? City staff will check on the status of this
- Street trees between Upland and Roseland are virtually dead. Can they be replaced? This information/request will be reviewed and a solution reported back to the Committee
- Is it cheaper to do just trees or a combination of trees, bushes and flowers through the square

8. Next Steps – Susanne recapped the unresolved issues discussed:

- identify space for cyclists taking left on Somerville Ave to wait
- confirm the location/design of crossings, including Davenport crosswalk
- address accessibility issues at tip of the T plaza for handicap access
- identify bus stop locations
- prepare concept for plaza landscaping and treatment of the left turn driveway
- develop plaza street furniture concept
- review truck routes and changes in truck restrictions
- review possibility of left turns from White St. and Somerville Ave.
- review coordination with Mossland signal

The next meeting of the Committee on Wed. Dec. 18th at 6:30 PM at the North Cambridge Senior Center was confirmed. A reminder letter and some meeting material will be sent ahead of time.